

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

contact: Marcia McBrien | (517) 373-0129

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD ANNOUNCES 2010 AWARDS

Honorees recognized for work on behalf of children in foster care

DETROIT, MI, November 5, 2010 – The [Foster Care Review Board](#) today announced the recipients of its 2010 Child Welfare Awards, presented at the FCRB's annual conference in Mt. Pleasant.

FCRB Program Manager Jim Novell explained that the awards “are presented annually to recognize exceptional work on behalf of abused and neglected children and families served by our state child welfare system.”

Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly, on behalf of the Michigan Supreme Court, commended the honorees for “ensuring justice for our state’s most vulnerable children and families. They have demonstrated extraordinary dedication and leadership. These awards are well deserved.”

The FCRB’s **Foster Parent of the Year Award** was presented to **Elaine Van Leeuwen**, a foster parent licensed through the Family and Children Services agency in Calhoun County. Van Leeuwen, who has served as a foster parent for 50 years, has cared for over 500 children in her home. Family and Children Services foster parent Arlen Facey, who nominated Van Leeuwen, reported that Van Leeuwen provides “a stable and positive home atmosphere for all of the children placed in her home.” Van Leeuwen was also praised for being “a strong advocate for the children placed in her home, and welcoming and supportive of their parents.”

Amy Venard of D.A. Blodgett-St. John’s Homes for Children in Kent County received the **Foster Care Caseworker of the Year Award**. Nominated by D.A. Blodgett Director Ron Apol, Venard was commended for her “outstanding case management skills, a high level of service delivery and advocacy for her clients, and the leadership necessary for improving service delivery for children and families.” Apol reported that Venard’s “extraordinary efforts have resulted in a high rate of children being reunified with their families [she] epitomizes what a social worker in child welfare should be.”

Tracy Green, managing attorney of the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, received the FCRB’s **Parent Attorney of the Year Award** for her representation of parents in child welfare cases. University of Michigan Law School Prof. Vivek Sankaran, who nominated Green, praised her as a “passionate and tireless advocate for parents.” Sankaran described Green as “nurturing and attentive ... [she] is well respected by jurists and her attorney colleagues in Wayne County, where she practices, for her professionalism, expert knowledge and zealous representation of her clients.”

The **Lawyer-Guardian Ad Litem of the Year Award** was presented to **Viola King**, an attorney with the Juvenile Law Group in Wayne County. Wayne County Family Court Referee Ilene Weiss Fruitman, who nominated King, described King as “the best and most professional representative and advocate for children of all who have practiced before me in my 13 years on the bench.” King is esteemed by her colleagues in the child welfare system, Fruitman reported, and “has the rare quality of truly listening to what [her clients] are saying, as well as being able to hear what they are not saying.”

Saginaw County Probate **Judge Faye Harrison** received the **Jurist of the Year Award** for her work as a family court judge. Harrison, a 30-year veteran, was nominated by Barbara Hill, chair of the FCRB volunteer board in Saginaw County, as “a wonderful and expressive advocate for children’s justice who has truly made a difference in the lives of children in Saginaw County.” Harrison, a past president of the Michigan Probate Judges Association, was cited for her leadership on the state and national level. “She is tireless and relentless in her efforts to ensure the cases before her are moved to timely permanency, and that children are safe and well cared for while in the foster care system,” Hill reported.

The FCRB, which was created by the Michigan legislature in 1981, serves as a statewide system of third-party review of the foster care system. The program is administered by the [State Court Administrative Office](#), the administrative agency of the [Michigan Supreme Court](#), and is comprised of citizen volunteers who serve on one of 30 local review boards throughout the state. Local boards review randomly chosen child abuse and neglect cases to assess the performance of courts, DHS, and private child welfare agencies.

For more information about the FCRB, and for information about volunteering, visit <http://www.courts.michigan.gov/SCAO/services/fcrb/fcrb.htm>.

-- MSC --